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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: CHERNOMYRDIN TOUR D'HORIZON

Classified By: Ambassador for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

Summary

11. (C) The Ambassador met on May 19 with Russian Ambassador Viktor Chernomyrdin. Discussion focused on domestic Ukrainian politics, with Chernomyrdin regretting the "lost years" brought about by the conflict between President Yushchenko and PM Tymoshenko. He expressed irritation at the EU and Yushchenko for their approach on gas pipeline issues, citing the absence of Russian agreement to provide additional gas for an upgraded transit system and underlining the viability of the South Stream and North Stream projects. Welcoming the "reset" in US-Russia relations, Chernomyrdin noted the potential for cooperation on issues like a START follow-on agreement and Iran. He regarded the possibility of the US opening a diplomatic post in Crimea as highly sensitive and likely to generate local opposition. Chernomyrdin inquired whether Kyiv had approached the US with a request for a submarine, asking that we turn down any such proposal. End Summary.

Ukrainian Politics

12. (C) Chernomyrdin lamented that Ukraine's political leadership (read Yushchenko) was stuck "searching for evidence of the first ancient Ukrainian," instead of running the country. There would be no surprises in the upcoming presidential contest, with the three main players (Yushchenko, Yanukovich, Tymoshenko) possibly joined by a fourth contender, either former Speaker Yatsenyuk or current speaker Lytvyn. Ukraine urgently needed a clear delineation and division of powers within the government, or the current "tragic paralysis" would continue. Characterizing the four years since the Orange Revolution as "lost years," Chernomyrdin added that having Yushchenko back as President would not provide stability -- the other candidates would be able to make accommodations and take the country forward.

13. (C) Yushchenko's interference in the work of the PM and her government -- revoking Cabinet of Ministers' resolutions, issuing detailed instructions for Tymoshenko's international trips -- was damaging and had led to four "lost years" in Ukraine. He added that the 2007 early parliamentary elections had been a waste of money, time and effort and had brought no change. Chernomyrdin stressed that he had personally told Yushchenko and Tymoshenko that their actions were destructive, but both were unable to look beyond their intense personal dislike.

14. (C) Regarding the potential for a constitutional change Ukraine had two options, either returning to the pre-2004 document, or adopting a parliamentary system that provided for the Rada to elect the President. The constant discussion of constitutional changes was destabilizing and an outgrowth of continued political infighting, with each camp wanting "their" version to consolidate their power. Commenting on the resignation of Presidential Chief-of-Staff Viktor Baloha,

Chernomyrdin noted that Baloha had been a good administrator, but had far exceeded his role in his personal attacks on PM Tymoshenko. If Baloha had launched the attacks on his own Yushchenko should have intervened, and if Yushchenko instructed him to attack he had done a disservice to Baloha. Baloha had not caused Yushchenko's precipitous fall in the polls, but rather should be credited with the President not falling even further.

Energy/Gas

¶5. (C) Chernomyrdin said he was baffled by the GOU's current approach on its gas/oil pipeline system, noting that he had personally been responsible for its development in the 1980s. He cited the example of President Yushchenko asking for Swiss involvement in upgrading the pipelines, arguing that they had no experience in area -- "better to ask them to fix your apartment than get involved in the gas sector." The current situation in Kyiv was nonsensical, with President Yushchenko issuing decrees demanding oil be pumped from south to north through the Odesa-Brody pipeline -- even though Energy Minister Prodan has told Yushchenko that no sources are available.

¶6. (C) Responding to studies that show modernizing Ukraine's gas transit system would be cheaper than building new pipelines (South Stream and North Stream), Chernomyrdin stated that these studies all presupposed that more gas would be available to Ukraine for transshipment. He noted that "they (EU/Ukraine) might build, but they haven't asked for

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our gas." The EU approach on this issue had been poorly thought out and implemented -- "they are not impressing us - this approach is totally ridiculous."

¶7. (C) Finding future sources of gas for Nabucco was also not assured, according to Chernomyrdin. Once North Stream and South Stream were operating at capacity there might be gas for Nabucco, but even that was not guaranteed. Russia was committed to the two pipeline projects and the recent Sochi agreement between PM Putin and Italian President Berlusconi showed that South Stream was moving forward. Building the Baltic and Black Sea pipeline projects would also prevent Kyiv from "pulling their tricks every December and January." Commenting on discussion within the EU of the potential for Iran to supply gas for Nabucco, Chernomyrdin cited sensitivities involving Turkey and the Kurds. These issues would push the Iran question into the distant future, while South Stream and North Stream were intended to solve gas issues for "today and tomorrow."

Crimea/American Post

¶8. (C) Chernomyrdin described the strong "historic and psychological" ties between Russia and Crimea, noting that much Russian blood had been spilled on the peninsula. Crimea had historically been administered directly by Moscow, 80 percent of the population remained Russian speaking, and the continuous presence of the Black Sea Fleet had forged special ties between Sevastopol and Russia. Russia acknowledged Crimea was a part of Ukraine, but its special circumstances required Kyiv to treat Crimea with sensitivity and safeguard its autonomous status.

¶9. (C) Regarding the potential opening of a US diplomatic representation in Crimea (a possibility noted in the December 2008 US-Ukraine Charter), Chernomyrdin predicted that it was sure to generate a negative reaction. Current tensions over military exercises (Sea Breeze) indicated that locals were likely to obstruct a US presence. He agreed that warming US-Russia relations might decrease tensions in Crimea, but still cautioned that the US could handle Crimea from Kyiv and

that a move to Crimea would be "sensitive."

US-Russia Relationship

¶10. (C) Chernomyrdin, who said he would receive an award from President Medvedev in Moscow on May 20, noted that President Obama was sending "good signals" to Moscow and that it would be a "sin" not to use this opportunity for cooperation. The Kremlin was looking forward to the President's upcoming visit to Russia. Regarding arms control, Chernomyrdin noted that the visit would give impetus to efforts to extend START and that new initiatives might be possible as well. In this context US plans to place missile interceptor equipment in the Czech Republic and Poland were "not understandable."

¶11. (C) Closer US-Russia ties would also benefit Ukraine. Moscow had never threatened Kyiv with reprisals for closer US-Ukraine relations. He underlined that Ukraine should not be worried about the upcoming START expiration, as Russia was no threat to Ukraine -- "it would be like threatening ourselves."

US Sub for Ukraine?

¶12. (C) Chernomyrdin asked several times whether Kyiv had approached Washington and requested a submarine for its navy -- no context or source of information was provided. He asked that the US reject this request if/when made as it would increase tensions.

Iran

¶13. (C) A joint US-RF approach on Iran would be beneficial. Iran was Russia's neighbor and Moscow believed that with the right approach a way could be found to work an agreement with Tehran. During the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission the US and Russia had worked together effectively on Iran. Russia had cooperated with Iran on its civilian nuclear program, but had been careful to avoid transfer of any military technologies. A number of countries had the potential to develop nuclear capabilities. Trying to stop them with force or prohibitions would not be possible -- this situation required a new approach from leading powers.

TAYLOR